



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page# 3384-3397

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17042768) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17042768)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17042768)

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17042768>



A Deconstructive Analysis of 'My Feudal Lord', an Autobiographical Novel by Tehmina Durrani

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to apply Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction to Tehmina Durrani's autobiographical novel My Feudal Lord. It reveals the contradictory structure and binary oppositions that permeate the narrative, and destabilize fixed meanings. The analysis portrays the protagonist, Durrani herself, in contradictory roles such as a victim of patriarchal feudal violence and an agent in the power structures she later critiques. This presentation blurs the distinction between oppressors and oppressed and subverts fixed reading of the novel. Similarly, stable concepts (such as loyalty, love, or power) are internally destabilized by contradiction and ambiguity. This deconstructive reading of her story transcends feminist interpretations, and uncovers narrative instability, emotional ambivalence, and textual paradoxes of the novel. The tone and structure of the novel oscillate between defiance and longing, resentment and attraction, and demonstrate a complex subjectivity. The research examines that moments of apparent empowerment simultaneously reinforce subordination, which shows the flexibility of meaning. In this way, Derrida's approach reveals that the novel is continuously subverts its own claims, showing contradiction at Durrani's narrative.

Keywords: Derrida, Deconstruction, Contradictions, Binary opposition, Narrative instability, Tehmina Durrani, My Feudal Lord

1. INTRODUCTION

Tehmina Durrani, a Pakistani writer, an artist, a human rights activist, was born on 18 February 1953 in an educated and influential family. She is the daughter of a former governor of State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of Pakistan International Airlines – Shahkur Ullah Durrani. Her mother Samina Durrani, was the daughter of a Nawab – Sir Liaqat Hayat Khan, the prime minister of former princely state of Patiala. She married three times. At seventeen she married Anees Khan. They had one daughter Taniya, and were divorced in 1976. She later married Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a former chief minister and governor of Punjab. Khar, who married five times, and Tehmina Durani had four children. After being abused by Khar for several years, she ended her marriage of fourteen years in divorce. In 2003, Durrani married thrice-elected Chief Minister of Punjab Mian Shehbaz Sharif. Durrani resides in Lahore with her husband, who is currently the Prime Minister of Pakistan and a part of the politically prominent Sharif family. In 2015, she founded a foundation named ‘Tehmina Durrani Foundation, and continued its official activities till 2017. Once Tehmina Durrani said she continues the mission of Abdul Sattar Edhi, with whom she had worked for a few years. Tehmina Durrani is author of some books including “My Feudal Lord (1991)”, “A Mirror to Blind (1996)”, “Blasphemy (1998)” and “Happy Things in Sorrow Times (2013)”.

When Tehmina Durrani’s *My Feudal Lord* was first published in 1991, it caused a stir across the world, particularly South Asia. It is because; the novel is autobiographical in nature in which she covers her life particularly the time she spends with feudal lord Mustafa Khar. The novel, not only brings forward the brutality of domestic abuse within elite political circles, but it also breaks through deeply ingrained cultural taboos regarding female silence. On the surface level, the story which Durrani tells is personal sufferings and eventual escape. It recounts her marriage to Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a prominent political figure, whose charm and power hide his violent and controlling nature. But as we move through the pages, it becomes clear that this is not just a tale of private abuse. It is also a broader commentary on how power corrupts—how it infects intimate relationships, distorts love, and turns loyalty into a weapon. In this way, *the novel* operates at multiple levels: personal, political, and cultural.

So this became one of the reasons that the novel struck the chords in all quarters of the world irrespective of the country of her origin or other than that. Her novel has the honor to be translated into almost forty languages and it has been considered as sensational European bestseller. As the novel has features of fighting against the perceived patriarchy, so it was embraced by a huge number of feminist activists and scholars globally. They considered her novel as a turning point in feminist fictional arena of Pakistan which expounds the traumatic conditions of females and also, they welcomed Durrani as a real women rights’ novelist. It portrays the themes of double standard of our society to women, manipulation, domestic violence against women, concept of feudalism, love of mother, materialistic approach and sensuousness, greed and class system.

Over the years, critics and scholars have analyzed the book through various lenses—feminist theory, postcolonial critique, psychoanalysis, and even journalistic ethics. Much of this knowledge has been valuable. It has helped us to understand Durrani’s courage in narrating her trauma, the social and political structures that maintained her oppression, and the ways in which

her story challenged gender and power in Pakistan. However, these interpretations often rely on fixed meanings and coherent readings. They tend to frame the text as a clear protest against patriarchy or as a straightforward tale of victimhood and survival. Yet, the novel is more complicated than that.

Beneath the surface of its seemingly linear narrative, there lies a web of contradictions and internal oppositions. For instance, Durrani condemns her husband's abuse but also confesses that she is attracted to his authority, power and status. She seeks liberation, yet repeatedly returns to the same structures that oppress her. Her narration, while emotionally charged, often slips between tones—sometimes vulnerable, sometimes defensive, occasionally even romanticizing the very relationship she's critiquing. This is where deconstruction becomes especially useful.

The term "deconstruction" is related to the French word "*deconstuire*" which in English connotes "to undo the improvement of or the development of, to take to pieces." (R. Gnanasekaran, 2015). In philosophy, however, the word "deconstruction" was coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the late 1960s as a response to the idea of "destructive" analysis rendered by the German word '*destruktion*' of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), which literally means "destruction" or "de-building". Thus, the word "deconstruction" is genealogically linked to Heidegger. Instead of applying Heidegger's term of *destruktion* (destruction) to textual readings, Derrida opted for the term "deconstruction". Since then, the word "deconstruction" has entered the philosophical, literary, and political vocabulary, though it existed before, at least in grammatical and architectural jargon. (Cf. Juliana Neuenschwander, et al., 2017).

There are challenges in defining the theory of deconstruction, because Derrida himself who is its originator has never given an authoritative definition of it. As he says,

"Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflicted and differentiated contexts; it is only what it does and what is done with it, there where it takes place. It is difficult today to give a univocal definition or an adequate description of this taking place". (Jacques Derrida, 1988)

In Derrida's view, deconstruction is neither a philosophy, nor a doctrine, nor a method, nor a discipline, but "if it happens, it happens" (*ce qui arrive si ça arrive*). As he explains the word 'deconstruction';

"Deconstruction is not simply the decomposition of an architectural structure; it is also a question about the foundation, about the relation between foundation and what is founded; it is also a question about the closure of the structure, about a whole architecture of philosophy". (Derrida, 1988)

For Derrida again, there is no single deconstruction, but rather there are deconstructions in plural. Deconstruction is something heterogeneous. Each use of deconstruction cannot be taken under an existing definition of deconstruction. But

"...deconstruction is rearticulated each time it is used; it is through its particular uses, and it can always be put to new uses, so what it is, is never stable. We should think of deconstruction in terms of re-articulation". (Derrida, 1996)

Generally speaking, deconstruction is as a response and reaction against some important 20th century philosophical movements, among which the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure is

prominent one. Derrida himself frequently asserts that deconstruction is not a method, but a philosophical theoretical analysis, a critical outlook concerned with **the relationship between text and meaning**. In other words, it is an activity of reading and interpreting literary texts. It is a mode of criticism and analytical inquiry that “denotes the pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions upon which it is founded—supposedly showing that those foundations are irreducibly complex, unstable, or impossible.” ([Hobson Marian](#) 2012)

In the light of above statement that is provided by Hobson Mariam, it could be said that deconstruction is a method of analysis that seeks to uncover the multiple layers of meaning in a text and highlights the contradictions upon which the text is founded. It challenges the traditional idea that texts have a fixed, singular meaning determined by the author or context. If we divide the statement into parts, it will help us to overcome the confusions related to the statement.

a. Pursuit of Meaning of a Text to Expose Contradictions: One of the components of deconstruction is the idea that meaning of a text is not absolute or fixed. Rather, meaning is often constructed through contradiction, ambiguity, and instability. In other words, close reading and examining a text can uncover the ideas or concepts that may disagree with other ideas or concepts in other part of the text.

In *My Feudal Lord*, one of the clearest contradictions lies in the character, Tehmina Durrani. On one hand, she portrays herself as a victim of a patriarchal and abusive marriage. She narrates the physical, emotional, and psychological violence she suffered under Ghulam Mustafa Khar—depicting him as tyrannical, manipulative, and of controlling nature. However, this narrative becomes unstable by her own acceptance that she was attracted to Khar not only because of his status, but also because of her attraction to “authoritarian, conservative and overpowering” nature. Moreover, she leaves Anees Khan, described in the text as a kind and gentle man, for Khar, whose dominance and larger-than-life persona influence over her. This decision seems to be self-contradictory: Durrani seeks safety and fulfillment, so she engages in a relationship that ultimately becomes the site of her deepest suffering.

Similarly, her characterization of the character, Mustafa Khar is contradictory. He is described in horrifying details as violent, humiliating, and egotistical. However, at several other points, Durrani also recalls moments of his vulnerability i.e. when he pleads for forgiveness, shows affection toward their children, or appears remorseful and guilty after beating her violently. These humanly attitudes disturb the image of Khar, to consider him as just a villain. The tension between condemning and compassioning creates a narrative that invites readers to sit with ambiguity. This is the space where deconstruction operates: revealing that meaning is always being negotiated, never fully resolved.

b. Pursuit of Meaning of a Text to Expose Internal Oppositions: Internal oppositions in a particular text arise when it puts forth two seemingly opposing ideas or states that are difficult to acknowledge when exist simultaneously.

In the novel, Tehmina Durrani shapes her journey as a fight for freedom i.e. a courageous act of resistance against abuse. She decides to write the book, leaves her marriage, and shares her story with the public seems to position her as an empowered woman breaking free from oppressive

structures. However, a deeper reading reveals that this journey toward liberation is mixed up with continued dependency—emotional, social, and even financial.

Emotionally, Durrani continues to exhibit fear, longing, and psychological attachment to Khar. Even when she leaves him, she often feels the feeling of loneliness, fear of societal rejection, and anxiety about raising her children without the social status. These emotional dependencies reflect that there are some kinds of invisible chains that bind her even after being physically separated from the abuser, Khar. This reveals that freedom, in her case, is not absolute but partial, full of internal conflict and uncertainty.

Similarly, the most striking internal opposition lies in the very act of writing a book and documenting about her life. By doing so, Durrani gains control over her story i.e. she transforms her silence into speech, and suppression into authorship. However, this very act also exposes a paradox: while she portrays herself as powerless within the marriage, she established immense power by shaping public perception through the writing about her life. So, this act of writing and documenting about her life become a tool of empowerment. Thus, the text itself destabilizes its own foundation: the powerless becomes powerful, the silenced becomes the speaker, and the victim shapes the public discourse.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

My Feudal Lord is considered one of the most important literary works in Pakistani literature. Many researchers have applied many theories on the novel. Similarly, many critics have provided their feedbacks and reviews on the novel. Some of them are following;

The article of Somya Joshi (2024) explores the shades and forms of feminist resistance portrayed in Tehmina Durrani's autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord*. The article argues that it is not only narrative details of extreme forms of patriarchal violence, for instance, physical, emotional and social, but also a story of resistance that comes forth powerfully within an oppressive system. Her study shapes Durrani's work as a multi-layered expression of defiance. Her refusal to incorporate societal norms within herself, her pursuit of education, and her act of writing the book as a mean of presenting her own voice to the people not as an overt acts of rebellion but as personal yet political strategies of resistance. The article explores how initial romantic relationship of Tehmina Durrani with Mustafa Khar, a charismatic political figure, transforms into a prison of control, manipulation, and abuse. Joshi argues that this transformation reflects the dangers of love rooted in power imbalance, in which Khar has more control and dominance than Durrani. Similarly, the article also covers that the most radical act of Durrani is the choice to write and publish her story. She speaks out against a powerful man in a patriarchal society that resulted in Durrani's ostracization. However, her courage created a ripple effect that encourages other women to share their experiences. Joshi also touches on themes such as societal gaslighting, internalized misogyny, and the manipulation of public perception—all of which are used to suppress women's voices. The article further explores that the novel intersects the cultural expectations and structural violence. In the novel, sexual violence is addressed explicitly, with emphasis on the feeling of deep depression of such trauma. However, the final escape and redefining Khar as "Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband" signify the reclamation of her identity.

While exploring "Women's Exploitation in the Feudal Society" Noor Akbar (2023) finds oppression on women as exposed in *My Feudal Lord* of Tehmina Durrani. The author of the article

uses feminist theory of Kate Millett and also uses the method of textual analysis of Catherine Belsey. In his article, he adds that religion, politics, tribalism, and culture are patriarchal institutions, which collude to legitimize the subjugation of women and normalize male dominance. The article starts with illustrating that women are systematically conditioned into submission from an early age. To prove his arguments, he provides many examples on different occasions such as Durrani recalls, *"They prohibited me to join any male company... I was kept aside even from female groups which seemed a bit fashionable"* (p. 19). This was her mother who participates in this control. Furthermore, the criticism of the research shifts towards the feudal male figure, Mustafa Khar, who is described by Durrani as *"a savage animal, jumping on me, dragging me by the hair, hitting me in my face"* (p. 65). He manipulates women emotionally, physically, and sexually, treating them as disposable things: *"Mustafa built relations with females and separated from them with the blinking of eyes"* (p. 29). Similarly, Durrani repeatedly attempts to escape but she is thwarted by manipulative tactics, such as the kidnapping of her children. The author concludes his article by adding that the novel not only exposes individual abuse but also critiques institutions that are perpetuating gender-based violence. His study calls for structural reform, claiming that unless patriarchal systems are critically reexamined, women will remain trapped in cycles of powerlessness.

Similarly, M. Ehsan, et al. (2015) applies feminist theory of Julia Kristeva and study violence against women in feudal societies, particularly focusing on the work of Tehmina Durrani *My Feudal Lord*. Their article is about exploration of the issues of sexual harassment and domestic violence portrayed in the novel. Moreover, the authors of the article consider Durrani's work as a powerful narrative documenting the harsh realities that many women encounter, both in their homes and within wider societal structures. However, the center of this examination is Tehmina Durrani's marriage to Ghulam Mustafa Khar. There is also a detailed story of Khar, a man celebrated in the public sphere, who transforms into a symbol of private tyranny. He practices his best to control Durrani's life, and also uses psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual violence to assert his dominance. The study reveals that the attitude of Khar is not portrayed as the behavior of an individual, but rather as a reflection of broader societal norms that support male superiority over female. The article focuses on feminist perspective of Kristeva and explains how the voices and bodies of women are systematically suppressed under patriarchal narratives. The act of writing and documenting about her life is shown as a radical act of voice and agency. Similarly, Durrani is presented as a powerful model of resistance as she transforms from a subjugated wife to a vocal critic of feudal and religious hypocrisy. So, in this way, the novel becomes not just a story of person who survives in harsh condition, but it is a representation of female experience in male-dominated cultures. The authors end the article by concluding that the novel exposes the internal contradictions of feudal masculinity and contributes significantly to feminist discourse in South Asia, especially concerning gendered violence and the politics of silence.

In their article, S Salman and S H Rasool (2023) explore the narrative of Tehmina Durrani in *My Feudal Lord* and point out gender-based struggle between oppressive masculinity and suppressed femininity. They use feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, R.W. Connell, and Linda McDowell, and examine that traditional Pakistani society strengthens masculine authority and

restricts female autonomy. They have the opinion that narrative of the novel can be read as a "critique of the prevalent system" that systematically marginalizes women (p. 119). The authors argue that Mustafa Khar represents hegemonic masculinity for instance, "muscular," "strong," "aggressive," and "in control", are attributes that can be used to dominate and diminish women (p. 116). On the contrary, Tehmina Durrani symbolizes feminine resistance. The transformation of Tehmina Durrani from a subjugated wife to an outspoken critic disturbs the tradition of male dominance and female silence. As she narrates in the book, "If you are Mr. Khar, I am Mrs. Khar... I will not let you get away with it" (p. 118). The article also emphasizes that many-a-times religion and culture are manipulated to justify control over women. For that purpose, they provide an example from the novel that Khar refers to the Quran to declare that "a woman was like a man's land... the Koran says so," reducing her to an object of utility and obedience. Durrani counters this interpretation with her own: "To me, land had to be tended and cultivated; only then could it produce in abundance" (p. 117). The authors conclude their analysis by describing the novel as a powerful text that questions the social construction of gender role and critiques the religious and cultural systems that sustain the oppression of women. Thus, the voice of Durrani rises from the confines of patriarchy makes space for the resistance of women.

While analyzing the silenced voices in Tehmina Durrani's novel *My Feudal Lord*, Ms. Aiman P. Attar and Dr. Rajaram S. Zirange (2023) describe a painful journey of Durrani from feminist point of view as a woman oppressed by societal, feudal, and familial pressures. The authors in the article argue that the novel is not only a personal story but also a commentary on the system that subjugates women in Pakistan. The research explores that the journey of Tehmina Durrani reflects a woman's struggle to reclaim her autonomy after years of being abused, silenced, and controlled. The article begins by presenting the early life of Tehmina Durrani that is marked by discrimination from her own mother due to dark tone of her. Her marriage to Mustafa Khar is analyzed not as an escape from domestic restriction but as an entry into a new form of captivity. The authors focus on the patriarchal and feudal mindset of Khar that suppresses women. Similarly, her physical, emotional, and psychological sufferings are also explored in depth, with specific references to incidents of child abuse, gaslighting, and religious manipulation by her husband. What is prominent in the article is the defiance of Durrani such as speaking out in public, refusing to identify as Khar's wife, and finally deciding to write and publish her autobiography. The authors further argue that Durrani, through her narrative, faces the hypocrisy of religious and feudal institutions. The article concludes by praising Durrani and her courage in breaking of her own silence and also inspiring other women to challenge oppressive system. Her autobiography is seen not just as a journey of personal freedom, but also as a symbolic act of resistance against a system that thrives on women's silence.

Similarly in the research article "Feminism and Tribalism at Crossroads", Shazir Hassan et al. (2021) analyze that women are subjugated within patriarchal and tribal frameworks of Pakistan. The study considers *My Feudal Lord* as both personal testimony and a broader critique of feudal society in Southern Punjab, where identities of women are shaped, controlled, and suppressed by familial and cultural expectations. The authors argue that Durrani's courage to write the novel positioned her as "an essential agent of change," especially when she declares: "*Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you just as Tehmina Durrani's ex*" (p.110). This reflects her

resistance against the tradition of feudal silencing and her reclamation of narrative authority. Moreover, the research emphasizes that women are trained from a young age to show obedience. Durrani notes, *"My crime was that I did not look obedient"* (p.113), reflects that even silent resistance is punished. The study also critiques the hold of tribalism over societal norms, and portrays that women's lives are governed not by laws, but by the power of male honor. Feudal men, like Khar, are "above law and all authorities" (p.116). The painful revelations of the novel such as public humiliation, forced loyalty, and the use of children as hostages, reveal that oppression is institutionalized. At last, the authors of the research article conclude that the novel is not just an autobiography, but a strong resistance against a social structure that punishes female autonomy. Durrani's voice becomes a site of resistance against a system where *"feudalism is an official license to rape, plunder, and even murder"* (p.115), which makes her narrative urgent and transformative.

Atiq Ur Rehman (2021) in his article, applies Sigmund Freud's structural theory of personality i.e. about Id, Ego, and Superego, and analyzes the psychological conflicts of Tehmina Durrani, the protagonist of her autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord*. The study argues that decisions made by Durrani are primarily governed by her Id, which results in a personality marked by emotionally unstable, impulsive, and morally confused. The author observes that early love of Durrani for Anees Khan is driven by irrational passion. That is why when her family warn her, she insists, *"I, except Anees, would marry none, without your say in the matter"* (Durrani, 1991), and regrets her decision days before the wedding. Similarly, her materialistic and emotional desires shape her later obsession with Mustafa Khar: *"I was prevailed over by thought of my nuptial bonding with Mustafa and I was assured of break up with Anees"* (Durrani, 1991). Even when Sherry warns her, she dismisses her as weak: *"I considered Mustafa's grace and charisma too much for Sherry... and saw this as her failure"* (Durrani, 1991). The author argues that her rational mediator, Ego, is largely absent, and her Superego, although occasionally active, but it is too weak to oppose her desires. For instance, when she temporarily thinks about honor of her family, she says, *"I became weak by considering all the social consequences... my parents, my brother, unmarried sisters..."* (Durrani, 1991). But, her Id ignores these concerns. The author of the article concludes that Durrani is a "self-indulgent, indecisive, obstinate, rebellious, immoral, and confused lady" whose psyche is ruled by the pleasure principle, Id. Her actions such as marrying impulsively, betraying partners, and writing about her life as revenge, are all symptoms of Id-driven choices.

Besides, Rajpal Kaur (2016) critically examines that *My Feudal Lord* provides a voice to women who have been silenced by patriarchal, feudal, and social systems in Pakistan. The study explores the novel as a powerful narrative that appears "from the margins" to question dominant ideologies that justify the subjugation of women. The author argues that social conditioning plays a key role in the subjugation of women. Durrani writes, *"My mother demanded total obedience... I obeyed, but my crime was that I did not look obedient"* (p. 24). It means that she is trained to submission from a young age. This internalized oppression is reinforced through marriage with Khar, where she is told, *"Never—ever—disobey me! You have to do what I tell you to do"* (p. 95). According to the article, feudal ideology considers women as a commodity. Durrani recalls, *"A woman was like a man's land—'The Koran says so,' he said"* (p. 107), which reflects that religious texts are misinterpreted to validate male dominance. The novel also describes extreme physical

violence, as when Khar “*threw me against a wall... again, and again, and again*” (p. 103), which shows the brutality that a woman silently suffers. The author of the article considers that Durrani’s act of writing as a defiance. It reclaims space for marginalized voices and questions societal taboos: “*Well I am a woman, so I naturally write from a feminine perspective... my work is about breaking of a silence from a part of the society that cannot speak out*” (qtd. in Srivastava, p. 157). The author summarizes the article by considering the novel as a personal act of resistance and a political criticism of the structures that marginalize women. It also provides a critique of feudal masculinity and redefines the boundaries of female voice and agency in South Asian literature.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is qualitative in nature that is grounded specifically in the framework of deconstruction theory. It does not aim to generalize findings across a broader population, as in quantitative research, but instead to perform an in-depth, contextually grounded examination of a single, complex autobiographical narrative. This approach is suitable for literary criticism, where the goal is to interpret rather than to measure. This research depends on secondary data source to conduct the analysis of the novel i.e. *My Feudal Lord*. The data consists of the textual content of the novel itself, which serves as the central subject of the research. As far as data analysis technique is concerned, the researcher chooses **close textual analysis through which the researcher examines narrative events, character portrayals, dialogues, themes and motifs** to reveal contradictory ideas and binary oppositions (from now onward internal oppositions as Hobsan Mariam said) which result into instability of meaning.

4. DISCUSSION

While analyzing the narrative of the novel with a deconstructive lens, one can easily reveal contradiction and internal opposition in the dedication of the novel, *My Feudal Lord*. The novel is structured as a courageous act of exposing deeply established patriarchal and political injustices, the dedication reads, “*Four special people helped me through the nearly impossible task of writing this book..... I cannot take the responsibility of naming them, but I am indebted to them all.*” This anonymity questions the consistency of her bold voice. Durrani names the powerful figures that oppressed her; however, she chooses to conceal the identities of those who supported her. This decision presents an internal opposition between public exposure and private protection. On one hand, the novel is considered as a radical break from silence, with a purpose to break up the taboos of female suffering and subjugation, but, on the other, it maintains silence under the guise of respect or safety for her supporters. This creates a kind of contradiction in her storytelling, an act of fear/care within a text defined by fearlessness.

There is one of the most significant contradictions rooted in emotional choice of Durrani’s marriage. Despite being deeply in love with her first husband, Anees Khan, whom she had long wished to marry, she ultimately divorces him and chooses to marry Mustafa Khar, a man whom she clearly describes as authoritarian, conservative and overpowering. Durrani writes, “*Mustafa was authoritarian, conservative and overpowering I knew from the start—but that was precisely what attracted me so much*” (Durrani, 1995, p. 39). This confession reflects a contradiction where the said traits, she later condemns as oppressive, were initially the source of attraction. Moreover, Durrani shows a clear awareness about the traditions of feudal system, and states, “*According to*

feudal tradition, a wife was honour-bound to live her life according to her husband" (Durrani, 1995, p. 107). Even with such knowledge, she willingly steps into the role of a feudal wife. This contradiction reveals a deeper internal opposition between her desire for "powerful and charismatic" person and her later realization of his "controlling" nature. The qualities she initially attracted towards such as dominance, power, and authority become reasons for her destruction and sufferings.

Similarly, Tehmina Durrani claims that Mustafa Khar tried to impress her, but her actions suggest the opposite, so there is also a contradiction between her words and behavior. She writes, *"I was flattered when Mustafa noticed, and upset when he did not"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 65), this statement clearly shows her emotional dependency on him. She appears to be constantly seeking his approval and attention; rather, being the one in control or being pursued. This contradicts the claim that it was Mustafa who tried to win over her heart. The emotional reaction she described shows that she was more interested in gaining his attention than she admits.

Moreover, in some other part Durrani admits that she lost faith in her husband, Anees. She writes, *"I had no faith in his abilities and little respect for his intellect,"* (Durrani, 1995, p.33). This is because she feels that he is too weak to stand up to her mother. Actually, she had a distant and controlling relationship with her mother, who dominates the household and makes all decisions. Durrani writes, *"When my mother spoke, it was a command, and we were to carry out orders in silence"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 25). Her mother's cold and dismissive attitude affected Durrani's emotions. During this emotional turmoil, she began seeking validation and support from Mustafa Khar, a powerful and controlling person. Later on, she claims that *"Mustafa seemed always to be trying to impress me,"* (Durrani, 1995, p.34) but her own words reveal the opposite. She is the one trying to get his attention by changing her clothes and behavior, feeling nervous and guilty when he does not respond. She even writes, *"I began to imagine that Anees would be far more suited to a woman like Sherry, and that the chemistry that Mustafa and I could combine would be unstoppable"* (Durrani, 1995, p.33). This clearly shows that she is in pursuit of Mustafa. The contradiction lies in Durrani's claim that Mustafa tried to impress her, while in reality, her actions and emotions show that she was seeking his approval.

While exploring the novel through a deconstructive lens, there found a clear-cut contradiction in Durrani's claim of staying in her abusive marriage with Mustafa Khar for the sake of her children. She writes, *"I had to keep my marriage together for the sake of my children and myself. I had invested too much pain and compromise in this relationship..."* (Durrani, 1995, p. 140). These lines reflect that her motherhood and emotional investment were strong reasons to tolerate sufferings. However, earlier in the novel, she willingly divorced her first husband, Anees, who is described as a *"good-natured and innocent"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 37). Moreover, she also left her daughter, Tanya with her husband, Anees, and willingly married Khar in a complete secrecy. She states in her novel, *"I left Tanya with Anees, promising to return for her in three days, and flew to Lahore. Mustafa and I travelled to his home village of Kot Addu. On 25 July 1976, in complete secrecy, we were married by a trusted mullah"*. (Durrani, 1995, p.140). This contradiction reveals an internal opposition in Durrani's self-image i.e. whether she is selfless or selfish: while she presents herself as a mother who sacrifices her personal desires for her children, her past actions and choices reflect a wish to leave her husband and her child when driven by personal desires.

Similarly, by using deconstructive lens on the same novel, one can find a strong contradiction that emerges in Mustafa Khar's character, particularly between his religious practices and his violent behavior. On the surface, he appears to be a devout Muslim who observes religious values with seriousness like fasting during the month of Ramadan. However, his actions reveal a stark contrast. Durrani in her novel recounts an incident happened in Ramadan: *"The servant was five minutes late laying the food for iftaari, the sunset meal that breaks the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan. When he finally arrived, a hungry Mustafa exploded. In the presence of his mother, who lived with us, he thrashed the poor man until he was barely conscious"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 59). This moment exposes a deep internal opposition of his outward piety and his inner cruelty. Ramadan teaches self-discipline, mercy, sympathy with poor, and above all patience, but his reaction reflects none of these values. Instead, it shows that he observes religious values to show himself a religious man to the people, while his inner self is governed by aggression, cruelty and impatience. The contradiction lies between the spiritual purpose of fasting and the violent action against the poor man reveals the hypocrisy in Mustafa Khar's character.

Besides this, there is another contradiction in Mustafa Khar's character that emerges by taking into consideration his expression of love and his act of violence. When he was imprisoned in jail, he wrote some letters which were deeply emotional and affectionate. Durrani writes about those letters that *"His letters were embellished with romance as he explained his unreasonable attitude of possessiveness and insecurity by saying, 'All the great legends of love end in tragedy... Without you I cannot achieve anything,' he declared. 'I feel that I can achieve anything when you are at my side. I can take the greatest of risks. I would gladly die today, if I knew that you would remain committed to me'"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 199). These romantic words reflect deep kind of emotions and admirations. However, this tenderness stands in direct opposition to his abusive behavior, as she recalls, *"There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me for some reason: the food was late, his clothes were creased."* (Durrani, 1995, p. 62). This contradiction reveals an internal opposition in Mustafa's personality: his emotional letters of love are neutralized by his act of violence and oppressive attitude towards his wife. The man who claims that he cannot live or succeed without his wife is the same man who beats her and daily harm upon her.

In the novel, one can easily finds that Mustafa Khar's proclaimed identity is clearly contradicted to his actual political motives. At first, he is shown as a visionary leader who has devoted his life to social justice, as written as, *"He was pro-Russian, anti-military, anti-feudal, anti-industrialist and anti-bureaucratic corruption"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 199), but at the other part of the novel, a very different side of Khar is exposed. Durrani in her novel writes, *"I advised him to address the pertinent issues of the times, to pinpoint the defects in the political structure... Mustafa was not interested in being the conscience of the nation: all he wanted was power"* (Durrani, 1995, p. 221). This highlights a basic internal opposition in his political character of Mustafa Khar; his public image depends upon ideological commitment and socialist values, but his private ambitions reveal that he is ready to sacrifice those values in pursuit of power and authority.

Again a powerful contradiction reveals in the narrative of the novel when Durrani portrayed Khar's character through his dual role as an abuser and as a man who pleads for forgiveness. Durrani frequently describes him as a violent person; she says, *"He threw me down on to the bed and jumped on me... Like lightning, he leaped off me... He threw me against wall, picked me up*

and threw me against another one- again, and again, and again. I no longer knew what was happening. Something burst in my ears. I felt an agonizing pain in my eyes. Something split. Something swelled. Then the pain merged into one deep, enthralling sense of agony" (Durrani, 1995, p. 60). Yet, in stark contrast to this portrayal of power, Khar also pleads for forgiveness. Tehmina narrates, "He fell at my feet and wept. 'I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!' he wailed. 'What have I done to you?' He begged forgiveness." (Durrani, 1995, p. 60). This description of Khar by the narrator sharply contradicts the dominant narrative about him as a violent and a powerful feudal lord. The contradiction lies in the question: how can a man who is so obsessed with power and control lower himself to such vulnerability? If Khar truly represents the patriarchal order, as Durrani frames him, then his plea for forgiveness disrupts that very image.

Additionally, Durrani often portrays herself as a submissive woman, constantly oppressed by people around her. However, several of her choices strongly contradict with her participation and active role in shaping her life. When the novel begins, she insists on marrying Anees though her family had strong opposition. She recalls, "I told my mother that, if I could not marry Anees, I would marry no one" (Durrani, 1995, p. 12). This moment shows assertiveness rather than submissiveness and resistance to authority, not passivity. Later on, she chooses to divorce Anees, whom she describes as gentle and good-natured, without being forced by others. She writes, "I decided that putting him (Anees) out of his misery was the only way to quash my own. I confessed everything, and asked for a divorce" (Durrani, 1995, p. 45). Moreover, she leaves her daughter, Tanya, and secretly marries Mustafa Khar, with her own free will, although she is warned about him by his ex-wife, that he is a controlling and an abusive man. She admits, "I left Tanya with Anees... Mustafa and I travelled to his home village of Kot Addu. On 25 July 1976, in complete secrecy, we were married by a trusted mullah" (Durrani, 1995, p. 50). In addition, she decides to write and publish about her personal life that acts as a bold act of agency. These decisions show that Durrani was not simply a passive victim rather she was actively involved in shaping her life. So there lies contradiction between her characterization and actual decisions which reveals an internal opposition in the narrative: on one side she is shown as a submissive woman while on the other side she is an empowered agent who shapes her own life.

Similarly, the novel presents a powerful critique of the patriarchal and feudal structures in Pakistani society. The very title of the novel refers to Mustafa Khar, a political and feudal figure, who is the embodiment of the said systems and exerts total control over women's lives. Durrani in her novel exposes that her marriage-life was destroyed due to the oppressive nature of patriarchy and feudalism. Keeping this perspective in mind, the book looks like a call for women's empowerment and resistance against traditional power systems. However, an internal contradiction arises when Durrani describes her maternal home. It was not her father, but her mother who dominated the household. Durrani states in her novel, "It had been difficult to watch this powerful government official (her father) submit to constant nagging. Sometimes, at night, I would hear my parents argue behind closed doors; she always sounded aggressive and he always sounded apologetic" (Durrani, 1995, p. 219). In addition, she admits, "When my mother spoke, it was a command, and we were to carry out orders in silence" (Durrani, 1995, p. 25). So, these statements clearly imply that her father was a passive and a suppressed figure while her mother was dominant and powerful. Moreover, it was her mother who contributed to her sufferings during

childhood. This contradictory idea clearly stands in opposition to the general critique of the novel i.e. male-driven oppression. This internal opposition complexes the feminist message of the book: while it advocates for women's liberation, it also acknowledges that power, regardless of gender, can become destructive. Thus, the text reveals that the binary of man as oppressor and woman as victim, shows that domination is a systemic issue, not solely a gendered one.

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion has provided a detailed deconstructive analysis of *My Feudal Lord*, focusing the contradictions, internal oppositions, and shifting narrative positions that is present in Tehmina Durrani's autobiographical text. It has revealed that the narrative resists fixed and singular interpretive frameworks. A major finding is that the identity of the protagonist does not seem stable or singular. Durrani moves between opposing roles such as submissive wife and resistant narrator, emotionally dependent partner and symbol of freedom/independent woman. This continual fluctuation disrupts the logic behind the narrative. Therefore, the narrative of the novel does not allow the reader to comfortably characterize the protagonist as either fully passive or entirely empowered. Her character is shaped by both complicity and resistance, shaped as much by silence as by speech. These co-existing forces within her identity are precisely what deconstruction aims to expose: the instability that lies beneath seemingly coherent narratives. Similarly, the portrayal of Ghulam Mustafa Khar is positioned as a symbol of patriarchal and feudal control, yet the narrative also contains instances where his actions are shown in moments of vulnerability or emotional complexity. These narrative shifts serve to dismantle the simplicity of good versus evil, which further highlights the blurred boundaries that characterize the text. The text also questions and destabilizes them from within, rather than reinforcing binary power structures. So, the analysis demonstrates that the text of the novel is rich with narrative tension and the value of Durrani's work lies in providing the multilayered and contradictory truths rather than that of just providing resolution. Thus, by accepting the instability at the heart of the text, the discussion shows the power of deconstruction as a tool for uncovering deeper dimensions of meaning.

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